

Sept 26th 2010: Armour of God Series: Eph 6:18: Matt 26:36-46
"Straight Talking About Prayer"

I was reading a sermon recently about prayer in which the writer suggested that sometimes we can fall into the trap of speaking **about** God rather than **to** Him. Our prayers are full of information but somehow they lack a real connection from our heart to the heart of God.

There is no danger of that happening when you follow Paul's instructions about prayer in Ephesians 6:18, for he tells us to pray in the Spirit on all occasions. In other words God has given us freely this wonderful access into His presence and it is the Spirit who enables us to focus on the Almighty Father. To pray in the Spirit is to come to prayer in the awareness that it is the Spirit who guides us to the mercy seat, and to come with a deep desire for the Spirit to connect us with God. (Can we say that we truly do that?) To come with the confidence given us by God Himself, that our prayer will be more than empty words but thoughts that enter into Glory itself, because it is the Spirit who brings to thought the things we need to say or ask. Because it is the Spirit who, as Romans 8:26 says:- 'helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express'.

Paul has been speaking in this passage about the Armour that God gives believers because of the severe battle we are in against the powers of evil, but as he comes to the end of his illustration he knows that the armour by itself is not sufficient. Power from above is needed and that comes only through prayer. Prayer in the Spirit.

That this is not prayer where the Spirit takes over control of our minds or words so that we have little or no idea about what we are thinking or praying, is evident by the fact that Paul encourages us to pray using different forms of prayer—like praise, confession—and to bring our own requests. We pray out of our own hearts and minds, but we are conscious that we do so not in our puny strength, but in the Spirit.

Now what I sense from this verse, is that Paul here is giving these Ephesian believers some pretty straight talking about prayer, and I'm sure we need it as much as they do. Prayer was so vital to Paul and he wants it to be as vital for them and for us too. So Paul ends this section by pleading with them to

pray for one another and also for him. But for us to pray as we should we need to take to heart a few things about prayer.

First: Prayer is Powerful

Look with me again at Ephesians 6:18

"And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."

Paul doesn't actually say in that verse, Prayer is Powerful, but the context of this passage is that the believer needs to put on this Armour because the battle is way beyond a human battle. It reaches to a spiritual plain where the evil powers are mighty and fearsome. And it is obvious that the armour is only complete when the key element of prayer is included. Prayer causes the power of God to be with us in the battle and in the daily working out of our mission to be God's chosen ones for His purposes on this earth. Prayer is the most powerful piece of equipment we have. It is our communication network that enables us to call upon divine support for ourselves, for others, and which we are to use '***on all occasions***'.

Paul obviously had this strong belief in the power and efficiency of prayer—do we share that? For most of us I feel, this awareness of the value and power of prayer is something that develops in us as we grow in our Christian faith and as we learn to rely on God more and more. I know it has been that way for me. As I have discovered more about my human insufficiency for the Lord's work, so I am understanding more every day it seems, about the lifeline which is prayer and the power it releases.

We don't get to know the power of prayer through having all our prayers answered exactly according to what our desires were when we prayed. Because that will never happen. We pray for what we think is needed, but often God responds differently because He knows what is most needed. We get to know the power of prayer as we accept the truth that no prayer a believer prays is a wasted breath. We get to know the power of prayer when we take seriously the promises that God gives us in His word about how He hears and answers each prayer we pray.

Recently we have heard a lot about the floods that caused such havoc over Eastern Australia. But there were some towns that were better prepared

than others because they knew when the water would peak and, from the records they had, what areas would be most threatened. So they fortified with sand bags, before the floods came, those particular areas. And it is probably true that not one of those sand bags laid down was a wasted act. And in like manner God has let us know about the floods of evil that will attack our work for Him, ourselves, our families, the ministry for His name throughout the world.....and our prayers are in a small way like sandbags. Calling upon God's intervention because human effort alone is insufficient—it is a spiritual battle with earthly implications.

Having this deeper understanding of the Power of Prayer leads to us prioritizing prayer more, and to putting more effort than ever in praying in the Spirit and truly connecting with Almighty God.

Second: Prayer needs to be persistent

With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying

The passage that was read to us this morning took us into the centre of the battle that Christ fought against the insidious power of evil there in Gethsemane. There He prayed because He knew that He needed the power that prayer brought into that situation. He knew that He needed to pray and in this passage He goes to earnest prayer again, and again, and again. And when He prayed, 'your will be done', it was not just a prayer of surrender to His Father's will. It was also through prayer, a calling for the power of the Almighty to be released at the cross so that God's will, being the salvation of this world, would be accomplished.

And even as He with alertness and with perseverance prayed, so He called His friends to do the same, for themselves and for Him. He said to them in Matthew 26:41

"Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the body is weak."

Paul no doubt, had that in mind when he said 'be alert(watch) and always keep on praying'. The word translated 'always keep on praying' actually means with all perseverance. The same word used in Colossians 4:2 is translated as 'wrestling in prayer'.

The disciples in the garden could not do it. They went asleep, and the reason they went asleep said Jesus, was because the human spirit may have good intentions but the body is weak.

We often find it reasonably easy to persevere in prayer when we are in a crisis, but to make an extra effort to get up for the Saturday morning prayer time, or to regularly pray for that person or event, takes discipline. God has given us this wonderful gift of prayer and, says Paul, He doesn't want us to just dabble in it when it suits us, but to so order our lives and our thinking that persistent prayer is never far from us.

Third: Prayer is a Partnership

Paul says: ***With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."***

Prayer is the major instrument that God has given us for helping and blessing other Christians. We are to pray for all the saints. That is for all believers, even for those we have never met and will never meet. God will do something for those that we pray for. He may cause us to be an instrument of that blessing, by laying upon our heart something practical we can do for them after we have prayed for them. He may use someone or something else. Prayer for others is where it begins.

Our prayers are not just for believers of course. We are to pray for the lost, for those who govern, for the sick, and for our enemies. But here we are told specifically to pray for other believers.

Neither are our prayers just for others. We are encouraged to pray on all occasions, and that literally means that every incident of life is to be dealt with in prayer. The requests we bring are for ourselves, our families, and the situations we find ourselves in. But because prayer is a partnership we have here this direction to pray for all the saints. To pray for others as often, if not more so, than we pray for ourselves and the daily happenings of our lives.

On the first Sunday of my recent holiday we attended my son's church in Kalamunda and heard a visiting speaker from Uganda. He said something about prayer in passing, that has stayed with me ever since. How when he prayed for something for himself, he also prayed for others who were in need of the same thing. So if he needed money to cover some cost, he

would also pray for others, even those he didn't know, who were desperately in need of finance just to survive, that the Lord would meet their need.

I began to practice the same thing and it opened up a whole new prayer life for me while I was away. A couple of times when I was absolutely lost and separated from the family I not only prayed for the Lord to reconnect me with them, but I began to pray for the many families who get separated by war or disaster. People who desperately need to be reunited with children or parents. I started to think about those who have family members who are listed as missing persons, or who are on the hunt for parents they have never known and I prayed for them. And on those occasions when I was being stressed out by language difficulties and trying to get help in a different cultural setting, I prayed for those Christians who seek to serve the Lord in other lands who battle with such issues all the time.

And since being back here in Australia I've tried to continue to do that, and I'm discovering that this partnership in prayer is bigger than I ever realized before. That there are others around me who I know, and millions of saints who I don't know, who have the same needs that I am praying about and who experience similar problems, yet so often a heap worst, than what I have. And in thinking and praying about them, I feel that I have been blessed already, even though my situation remains the same. Partnership in prayer. Crying out to God for fellow Christians.

So this morning I want to leave you with these three aspects of prayer that Paul stresses in this passage. And I trust that you will go away and think about each one in relationship to your prayer life.

Power in Prayer

Persistence in Prayer

Partnership through Prayer

And as we sing this last chorus, sing it as a prayer that releases from God the power to transform your life.